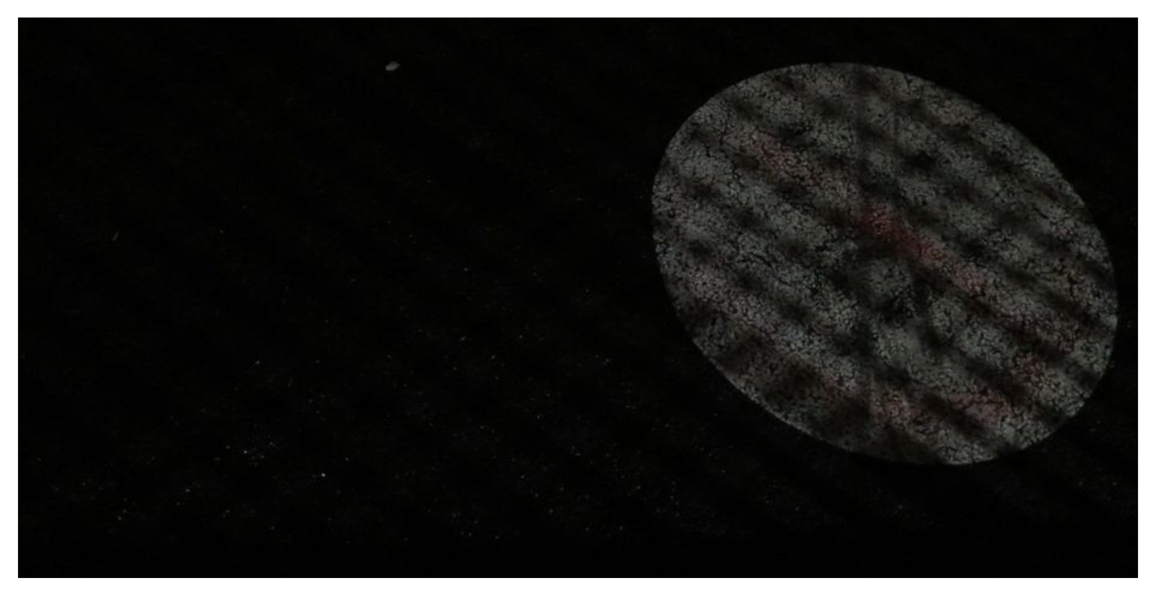
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ESTHER LESLIE 2018-08-20

THEODOR ADORNO & MASS CULTURE

PHILOFICTION ADORNO, BARBARISM, CULTURE INDUSTRY, DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTMENT, ENLIGHTMENT, MASS CULTURE, MUSIC

Introduction

Too many people talk about Theodor Adorno, and not enough people go through the difficult but bracing task of reading his texts. He is an easy man to caricature, because he believed in exaggeration as a means of reaching the truth. He said about psychoanalysis that "only in its extremes is it true". The same is true of his own writing.

Adorno was a product of German philosophy, imbued with the language of Kant and Hegel and Marx – though professional philosophers dislike the way that he wrote so much about music and society. They also object to his highly metaphorical, at times poetic style. However, Adorno's images are hardly poetic in the traditional sense – they are frequently anti-romantic and modernist. Professional philosophers are not noted for their appreciation of surrealist shocks either. Musicologists object to the way that Adorno talks about how music actually sounds rather than the logical structure of the score. This might seem to recommend him to champions of non-academic music, yet he spent his whole life denouncing pop music, which he remained old-fashioned enough to call 'jazz'. Sociologists find him too philosophical and philosophers find him too political. Adorno was a thorn in the flesh for people who believe that specialization is the only way forward for knowledge, yet he wrote in a way that baffles and repels the average reader. He's not had a good press.

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